Transitus Animæ: The Tollhouses in the West.

A Florilegium on Demonic Encounters in the Departure of the Soul in the Western Tradition.

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Introduction

Many Latin Christians find the concept of the Tollhouses very alien to them. They often think of them as an Orthodox counterpart of Purgatory, and they often try to compare these concepts with each other. But a post-mortem forgiveness (in the Orthodox case) or purification of sins (in the Roman Catholic case) is a concept present in the doctrine of both churches. The Latin church understand this purification happening in a place called “Purgatory”, which according to the traditional Latin teaching[1] is located inside Hell (the “inferior regions”; latin: Infernus; greek: Hades) and not in some third place.[2] The Orthodox also understand that those souls are in the underworld, which we call Hades, but the Orthodox Church does not teach any rigid definition, nor characteristics or rules for different abodes within Hades[3] (as the Roman Church has done with Purgatory and Limbo), because that would be pure speculation on unrevealed things. The Orthodox Church also don’t attribute to this

[1] Commentary on Sentences III; Distinction 22; Question 2; Article 1; Response to *Quaestiuncula* 2.

[2] However, Purgatory is commonly spoken as a third place among the Latins. The famous writer Dante Alighieri portrayed Purgatory as a third place. The old popular work “The poor man's catechism” says: *“Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world nor the next: this implies that some sins are forgiven in the other world; not in heaven, where there is no sin to be forgiven;* ***nor in hell****, where there is no forgiveness; therefore,* ***in a third place****, which is meant by purgatory.”* (The poor man's catechism, or, The Christian doctrine explained: with short admonitions, pp. 241-242). During the Council of Florence, Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini said to Mark of Ephesus: *“The above-mentioned truth [of Purgatory] is evident from the Divine Justice, which does not leave unpunished anything that was done amiss, and from this it necessarily follows that for those who have not undergone punishment here, and cannot pay it off either in heaven or in Hades, it remains to suppose the existence of a different,* ***a third place*** *in which this cleansing is accomplished.”*

[3] Ancient Judaism believed in different abodes within Hades (See: 1Enoch 22:1-12; 2Esdras[4Ezra] 7:75-101) this is also the Orthodox Church understanding: *“We the godly, following the truth and turning away from such innovations,* ***confess and accept two places for the souls of the dead****, Paradise and Hades, for the righteous and sinners, as the holy Scriptures teach us. [..]* ***But both places also have different abodes****...”* (Encyclical of the Council of Constantinople, 1722, addressed to the Orthodox in Antioch).

post-mortem pardon the role of any kind of purifying fire (let alone a "corporeal fire"),[4] but only the mercy of God through the Liturgy, prayers and alms-giving of the Church and its members. Therefore, both traditions have their own doctrine of forgiveness/purification of sins after death, and the Tollhouses are not part of it.

With this *Florilegium* we intend to demonstrate that a concept similar to the "Tollhouses" was also present in Western Christianity, especially in the Hiberno-Saxon Church (and that we can still find some traces of it in their tradition). However, it is essential to emphasize that when we talk about the Tollhouses here, we mean it in the broadest sense. We don't mean specifically the exposition according to St. Gregory of Thrace (the vision where the image of twenty tollhouses according to specific sins is presented), but in the sense of **the confrontation with the principalities and powers that the soul must face after leaving the body**. In its most general form, it refers to the idea that, after death, the demons try to find a reason to take our soul to Hades; some unrepentant sin, something in us that proves that we belong to them, not to Christ (like a tax-collector search for debts to collect). Whether the soul is finally snatched up by the demons or taken to heaven depends on the state of the soul at the time of death and the intercession of the living. Although this is a process related to the particular judgment, we must bear in mind that the demons **are not in the role of judges**, but of accusers before the Judge, and the angels are our defenders, as in a courthouse. Without further delay, let's get to the *Florilegium*.

[4] *Summa Theologicae*, Supp. App I. Q. 2, Art. 5.

Tertullian

Tertullian (155-220) was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. Considered "the father of Latin Christianity," as well as "the founder of Western theology."

"Now the compact you have made respecting him is to renounce him, and his pomp, and his angels. Such is your agreement in this matter. Now the friendly understanding you will have to carry out must arise from your observance of the compact: you must never think of getting back any of the things which you have abjured, and have restored to him, lest he should summon you as a fraudulent man, and a transgressor of your agreement, before **God the Judge** (for in this light do we read of him, in another passage, as the **accuser of the brethren** [Rev. 12:10], or saints, where reference is made to the actual practice of legal prosecution); and lest this Judge **deliver you over to the angel who is to execute the sentence, and he commit you to the prison of hell**, out of which there will be no dismissal until the smallest even of your delinquencies be paid off in the period before the resurrection. [...] Undoubtedly, **when the soul, by the power of death, is released from its concretion with the flesh**, it is by the very release cleansed and purified: it is, moreover, certain that **it escapes from the veil of the flesh into open space**, to its clear, and pure, and intrinsic light; and then finds itself enjoying its enfranchisement from matter, and by virtue of its liberty it recovers its divinity, as one who awakes out of sleep passes from images to verities. Then it tells out what it sees; **then it exults or it fears, according as it finds what lodging is prepared for it, as soon as it sees the very angel's face, that arraigner of souls, the Mercury of the poets**." (Treatise on the Soul, 53)

Commentary:

Tertullian, like a good lawyer, uses a figure from a legal case to exemplify the soul's journey when it dies. In a scene very similar to that presented in the Bible at the judgement of Joshua the high priest (Zec. 3). God is presented as the judge, the devil is the prosecuting attorney, and he will try to accuse you of breaking the contract you had with him (the renunciation of the Devil at the baptismal rite), in other words, he would claim the soul back as his property, if the accusation was true the Judge would reinstate the ownership of the soul to the previous owner, the accuser himself was also the executor of the sentence, and would take his property back into Hades, his kingdom. The reference to “Mercury of the poets” is because Mercury was known in the pagan religion as a psychopomp (ψυχοπομπός), one who guided the souls of men to the underworld. Tertullian, as the majority of Christians at the time, identifies those entities of the pagan pantheon and other spirits worshipped by them (daemons, *lares familiares*, etc..) as demonic spirits. For them Mercury/Hermes, Charon, Hecate and other Psychopomps were just demons who were in charge of taking people to Hades. Thus, for Tertulian, when the soul was *“released from…the flesh”* and *“escaped from the veil…into open space,”* it would face the *“accuser of the brethren,”* the same *“angel who…execute the sentence”* who would them try to claim the soul for himself, accusing it according to the sins it had committed during its earthly life, if he succeeded, he would take the soul *“to the prison of hell.”*

St. Augustine of Hippo

St. Augustine (354-430) was a theologian and philosopher of Berber origin and the bishop of Hippo Regius in Numidia, Roman North Africa. His writings influenced the development of Western philosophy and Western Christianity, and he is viewed as one of the most important Church Fathers of the Latin Church. This excerpt is St. Augustine's prayer for the soul of his mother, St. Monica, whom he believed was being accused by the Enemy in a trial.

"And I believe You have already done that which I ask You; but accept the free-will offerings of my mouth, O Lord. For she, when the day of her dissolution was near at hand, took no thought to have her body sumptuously covered, or embalmed with spices; nor did she covet a choice monument, or desire her paternal burial-place. These things she entrusted not to us, but only desired to have her name remembered at Your altar, which she had served without the omission of a single day; whence she knew that the holy sacrifice was dispensed, by which the handwriting that was against us is blotted out [Col. 2:14]; **by which the enemy was triumphed over, who, summing up our offenses, and searching for something to bring against us, found nothing in Him [John 14:30] in whom we conquer**. Who will restore to Him the innocent blood? Who will repay Him the price with which He bought us, so as to take us from Him? Unto the sacrament of which our ransom did Your handmaid bind her soul by the bond of faith. **Let none separate her from Your protection. Let not the lion and the dragon introduce himself by force or fraud. For she will not reply that she owes nothing, lest she be convicted and got the better of by the wily deceiver; but she will answer that her sins are forgiven** [Matt. 9:2] by Him to whom no one is able to repay that price which He, owing nothing, laid down for us. May she therefore rest in peace with her husband, before or after whom she married none; whom she

obeyed, with patience bringing forth fruit [Luke 8:15] unto You, that she might gain him also for You. And inspire, O my Lord my God, inspire Your servants my brethren, Your sons my masters, who with voice and heart and writings I serve, **that so many of them as shall read these confessions may at Your altar remember Monica, Your handmaid, together with Patricius, her sometime husband**, by whose flesh You introduced me into this life, in what manner I know not. May they with pious affection be mindful of my parents in this transitory light, of my brethren that are under You our Father in our Catholic mother, and of my fellow citizens in the eternal Jerusalem, which the wandering of Your people sighs for from their departure until their return." (Confessions, Book IX:36-37)

Commentary:

Augustine mentions that his mother wanted to have her name remembered at the altar, during the Eucharistic celebration, so that she would be under God's protection. But protection from what? Augustine answers: *"the lion and the dragon,"* a reference to Psalm 90[91]:13 [*"Thou shalt walk upon the asp and the basilisk: and thou shalt trample underfoot the lion and the dragon."*] whose beasts mentioned Christians commonly interpreted as demonic powers, and in the context, it can't be anything else, since Monica was already dead. In Augustine's view, these demonic forces would try *"by force or fraud"* to get between the soul and God, for our enemy is always *"summing up our offenses," "searching for something to bring against us."* Augustine then says that *"she* [Monica] *will not reply that she owes nothing*," that is, these demons would argue with her, question her, and accuse her of being in debt, but she, not trusting in her own strength, would not tell them that she owed nothing, but trusting in God's grace, would reply that any debt (sin) had been forgiven by Christ, who paid our debts. For the enemy who seeks something to accuse us of and collect our debts *"found nothing in Him in whom we conquer."* Augustine also mentions that he wanted

everyone who read his Confessions to pray for his mother Monica, and his father Patricio, which indicates that he (like the Orthodox) imagined this *post-mortem* process to be somewhat lengthy, and that the prayers would help even if some time had already passed.

St. Gregory the Dialogist

St. Gregory I, also known as Gregory the Great (540-604), was the Pope of Old Rome.

“One must reflect deeply on how frightful the hour of death will be for us, what terror **the soul will then experience**, what remembrance of all the evils, what forgetfulness of past happiness, what fear, and what apprehension of the Judge. **Then the evil spirits will seek out in the departing soul its deeds; then they will present before its view the sins towards which they had disposed it, so as to draw their accomplice to torment.** But why do we speak only of the sinful soul, when they come even to the chosen among the dying and seek out [something of] their own in them, if they have succeeded with them?” (Homilies on the Gospels, XXXIX, 8 [on Luke 19:42-27])

Commentary:

The Latin for “departing soul” is *egrediente anima*, the term means: “to go out” but also carries the meaning of going in an upward direction: “ascend, climb, to go up.”[5] St. Gregory is clear that this confrontation is something that “the **soul…**will experience,” not while one is still in the body dying, in his last moments, but when already dead, in a moment where the soul is already “ascending” towards heaven.

[5]https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0060%3Aentry%3Degredior

St. Kevin of Glendalough

St. Kevin of Glendalough [ca. 498-618] was an Irish saint, known as the founder and first abbot of Glendalough.

“A certain cruel soldier had frequently perpetrated robberies among those mountain ridges. He had never done a good action but one, which was praying each day, that through St. Kevin’s merits, his soul might be saved. On a particular occasion, being surrounded by those who were in pursuit of him, he was put to death, and afterwards cut to pieces. An Angel of the Lord then appeared to [St.] Kevin saying: “A certain wretched man, who hath daily invoked thee to ward off danger from his soul, is slain on this day. Do you, therefore, act valiantly in the Lord’s name, and **follow the demons who drag his soul to torments.** For, although his body is destroyed, yet through the power of God, **you shall snatch his soul from destruction**.” Then, the holy Abbot felt comforted. **Guided by the Angel, he was taken up from the earth to the higher regions of air, where he remained from the ninth hour to the following day, engaged in a contest with demons.** In fine, through the Mercy of God, he releases the wretched man’s soul from their power. Meantime, not knowing the cause of their holy Abbot’s absence, his monks felt sorrowful, on finding their venerable superior missing. When he returned to them, on the following day, he said: “O my brethren, bury the body of that culprit in your cemetery, **for on his account, I ascended towards heaven. His soul is now liberated from the demons, and is at rest in God’s presence**.” The monks did as they were commanded, while admiring those wonders wrought by the Almighty, through his holy servant.” (J. O’Hanlon, “Lives of the Irish Saints” Volume 6, pp. 62-63)

Life of St. Fintán of Taghmon (Codex Salmanticensis)[6][7]

Saint Fintán, or Munnu is one of the saints of Ireland and Britain, being the founder and abbot of the abbey at Teach-Mhunn, today Taghmon. He died in 635.

“When the day of his death had arrived, he summoned his community to him and blessed them. And, having received the body and blood of Christ, he slept, and a multitude of innumerable angels came towards him. **When a crowd of demons had encountered him in the air**, Saint Fintán looked to the heavens. Seeing Fintán's face, the demons fled this way and that with great fear, and there was no strength left in them until the end of the week, and they were not able to wage war against anyone. At Fintán's arrival all the *familia* of heaven [Eph. 3:15] rejoiced; where, in the sight of the eternal king, he remains without end in the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever. Amen.”

[6] Bibliothèque royale Albert 1er, MS 7672–7674, fols. 110–123.
[7] Codex Salmanticensis is a medieval Irish manuscript containing an extensive collection of Irish saints' Lives, now in the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels.

Life of Áed Mac Bricc (Codex Salmanticensis)

Saint Áed mac Bricc was an Irish bishop and died in 589.

“Saint Áed had promised to allow one of his monks to accompany him to heaven. And so, at the hour of his death, Áed said to him, “Prepare yourself, so that you might go with me on the **heavenly journey**.” When he proved unwilling, a certain pagan who had just arrived said, “If only you had told me to accompany you!” Áed answered him, “If you wish, wash yourself and lay yourself down on this bed with me.” When he had done these things, he and the saint died together. On the island of Í, St Columcille saw this and said, “This work which bishop Áed does now is mighty. **Behold, he leads a sinner, undeserving, with himself to heaven, without any demons bothering him**.” Indeed St. Áed passed to heaven like Christ with the thief, among the sweet songs of the choirs of angels, where he will rejoice without sorrow for eternity with our reigning Lord, Jesus Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.”

The Vision of Laisrén

According to German scholar Kuno Meyer, Saint Molaise of Leighlin (died ca. 639), also called Laisrén [or Laserian] of Leighlin, is the one who is depicted in the Old Irish prose narrative "The Vision of Laisrén." The manuscript is from the 15th century; its language suggests creation in the Old Irish period. c.850-925.

"Once upon a time Laisrén went presumptuously from the monastery of Clúain in order to purify Clúain Cháin, a church which is in the territory of Connaught. He fasted thrice three days while purifying the church. At the end of the third three days' fast sleep overpowered him in the oratory, and in his sleep, he heard a voice saying to him: 'Arise!' The first time he did not move. When for the second time he heard the voice, he raised his head and made the sign of the cross over his face. Then he saw the church in which he was, all alight, and yet there was still a part of the night. And between the chancel[8] and the altar he saw a shining figure. Said the figure to him: 'Come towards me!' At that voice the cleric's whole body from crown to sole shook. Then all at once he beheld his soul hovering over the crown of his head, and knew not which way she had come out of the body. And he saw the church open above towards heaven, and **two angels taking the soul between them and rising into the air. Thereupon he beheld a host of angels coming to meet her. And he saw another host of demons,** with fiery hair about them and fire coming out of their every limb. On those demons he discerned three shapes. Some had a very black shape, and had fiery bulging spears in their hands; others had a dark brown shape and had fiery darts in their hands. A third number had a

[8] The chancel is the area near the altar, where the choir and the clergy (deacons or sub-deacons assisting the priest) stand during worship, while the congregation is in the nave. This area of the church in times past was divided by a "chancel screen" (from which the name is derived) or "rood screen," (similar to the eastern "iconostasis") often with curtains that were open and shut during the Liturgy. It was only in the XVI-XVII centuries that the Latin churches started to completely remove the screens, leaving the altar completely open to the view.

shaggy shape, and fiery hair growing through them like the hair of a thistle, and fiery javelins in their hands. **Now these three bands formed a single array of battle to wrest the soul from the angels. And one of them, as long as his breath would last, and without change of speech, charged the soul in one charge with what she had done of misdeeds since she was born.** That one charge seemed as terrible to the soul [...] and the demon said nothing but was true, nor did he charge her with anything of which she had made confession to a confessor before leaving the body. An angel of the great host answered the demon on behalf of the soul and said 'Now thou hast charged thy whole charge.' The demon answered and said: 'I have not. I have not charged the greater part of it.' The angel answered: 'Thy charge can do us no harm, since before leaving the body it has been confessed and atoned for by penance according to the will of a confessor. Be off!' said the angel, 'You have no share in this man.' 'If God's word be true,' said the demon, 'we shall not part this way; for this man has not made a little child of himself as God commanded him' '*dicens: Nisi conuersi fueritis, et efficiamini sicut paruuli, non intrabitis in regnum caelorum* [And said: unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven - Matt. 18, 3].' 'God's word is true,' said the angel, 'for this man has not come [...] to stay with demons, for he will give warning before us to his friends.' 'Depart from us now!' said the angel. Forthwith they departed from them."

Saint Ciarán of Clonmacnoise

St. Ciarán of Clonmacnoise (c. 516-549) was one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland and the first abbot of Clonmacnoise. He is sometimes called Ciarán the Younger to distinguish him from the 5th-century Saint Ciarán the Elder who was bishop of Osraige. The Irish Life of Ciáran is edited from a late fifteenth-century MS. called the Book of Lismore. The text itself was written to be preached as a sermon on the saint's festival at Clonmacnoise c. 1091.

“When the time of his death was near to Saint Ciaran in the Little Church, in the thirty-third year of his age, on the fifth of the ides of September as regards the solar month, on Saturday as regards the day of the week, on the eighteenth day as regards the moon, he said, “Let me be carried out to the Little Height,” said he**. And when he looked at heaven, and the height of air above his head, he said, “Awful is this road upward.” “Not for thee is it awful,” said the monks. “Truly, I know not,” said he, “any of the commandments of God which I have transgressed: yet even David son of Jesse, and Paul the apostle, dreaded this way.”** Then the stone pillow was taken from him, to ease him. “Nay,” said he, “put it under my shoulder. *Qui enim perseuerauerit usque in finem, hic saluus erit* [For he that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved – Matt. 24:13]” **Then angels filled the space between heaven and earth to receive his soul.** He was brought afterward into the Little Church, and he raised his hand and blessed his folk, and said to the brethren to shut the church upon him till Coemgen should come from Glenn da Locha.” (The Irish Life of Saint Ciaran, XLIX)

St. Columba of Iona

St. Columba or Colmcille (521-597) was an Irish abbot and missionary, founder of Iona Abbey, an important center of Christianity and a focal point for the spread of Christianity throughout Scotland. His life (Vita Columbae) was written by St. Adamnan of Iona (624-704).

"{Of the Apparition of Angels carrying to heaven the soul of the blessed Brito} At another time while the holy man was tarrying in the Iouan island (Hy, now Iona), one of his monks called Brito, a person given to all good works, being seized with bodily illness, was reduced to the last extremity. When the venerable man went to visit him at the hour of his departure, he stood for a few moments at his bedside, and after giving him his blessing, retired quickly from the house, not wishing to see him die, and the very moment after the holy man left the house the monk closed this present life. Then the eminent man walking in the little court of his monastery, with his eyes upraised to heaven, was for a long time lost in wonder and admiration. But a certain brother named Aidan, the son of Libir, a truly virtuous and religious man, who was the only one of the brethren present at the time, fell upon his knees and asked the saint to tell him the reason of so great astonishment. The saint said to him in reply: **'I have this moment seen the holy angels contending in the air against the hostile powers; and I return thanks to Christ, the Judge, because the victorious angels have carried off to the joys of our heavenly country the soul of this stranger**, who is the first person that hath died among us in this island. But I beseech thee not to reveal this secret to any one during my life'." (St. Adamnan, Life of St. Columba Bk. 3.6)

"{Of a similar vision of Angels whom the blessed man beheld carrying to heaven the soul of a certain virtuous woman} Whilst the holy man was living in the Iouan island (Hy, now Iona), he one day

suddenly raised his eyes to heaven and uttered the words, “O happy woman happy because of thy virtues; **the angels of God are now carrying thy soul to paradise.**” Now these words from the mouth of the saint were heard by a certain religious brother, a Saxon, by name Genere, who was at the moment working at his trade, which was that of a baker. And on the same day of the month, at the end of the same year, the saint addressed the same Genere the Saxon, and said, “I see a wonderful thing; behold, **the woman of whom I spake in thy presence last year, now meeteth in the air the soul of her husband, a poor and holy man, and together with the holy angels engageth in a contest for it against the adverse powers; by their united assistance, and by the aid of the virtuous character of the man himself, his soul is rescued from the assaults of the demons**, and brought to the place of eternal refreshment.” (St. Adamnan, Life of St. Columba Bk. 3.10)

“{Of the Apparition of Angels who had come down to meet the souls of the monks of St. Comgell} At another time, when the venerable man was living in the Iouan island (Hy, now Iona), he became suddenly excited, and summoned the brethren together by the sound of the bell. ‘Now,’ said he, ‘let us help by our prayers the monks of the Abbot Comgell, who are just now in danger of being drowned in the Lake of the Calf (Loch Laodh, now Belfast Lough); **for, lo! at this moment they are fighting against the hostile powers in the air, and are striving to rescue the soul of some stranger who is also drowning along with them.’** Then after having wept and prayed fervently, he hastily stood erect before the altar with a joyful countenance, whilst the brethren continued to lie prostrate in prayer. ‘Give thanks,’ he said, ‘to Christ, for **now the holy angels, coming to the aid of holy souls, have rescued this stranger from the attacks of the demons**, and borne him off in triumph like victorious warriors.’.” (St. Adamnan, Life of St. Columba Bk. 3.13)

The Amra Coluim Chille (St. Dallán Forgaill)

Eochaid mac Colla (ca. 560-640), better known as Saint Dallán or Dallán Forgaill was the author of "The Amhra Coluim Cille," a panegyric on Columba, written shortly after Columba's death in 597, and considered one of the most important poems we have from the early medieval Gaelic world.

"As a serrated chariot goes through battle, **may it be so my soul shall go through the battle of demons to heaven**." (Forespeech)

"May he bring me past torments; May he bring us to him past the crew, who are tormenting every one, that is, demons: or, "**may he waft me past the demons of the air to the peace of the saints"**. Or, "*sech riagu*," that is, past the daughters of Phorcys: these are three daughters who are **named with different names in heaven, in earth, and in hell.** In heaven, indeed, Stheno, and Euryale [and] Medusa: in earth Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos: in hell, Alecto, Megaera, Tisiphone. (VII,28)

Commentary:

Like Tertullian, St. Dallán identifies the "demons of the air" with deities from the Greco-Roman mythology, who, despite the different names given to them by the pagans, were all members of the same demonic host that dwelt "in heaven [the air/celestial regions], in earth, and in hell."

St. Ruadhan

St. Ruadán mac Fergusa Birn, was an Irish Christian abbot who founded the monastery of Lorrha (Lothra, County Tipperary, Ireland), near Terryglass. He was known for his prophecies. He died in 584. After his death, he was venerated as a saint and as one of the "Twelve Apostles of Ireland."

"There was a certain cursed fellow in the district of Úi Néill called (per antiphrasin) Aed the guiltless. Many were his bad doings, for he was fierce and a counsellor of evil. Now this man offered his land to Aed, son of Brec. Aed promised him the kingdom of God in return. Afterwards the man died. **A vast pitiless host of demons fought against him. The holy bishop fought against them in the air on his behalf**. When they wanted to overpower the bishop and carry off the man to his own place and abode, viz. to Hell, bishop Aed promptly besought Ruadan and Columcille to come {to help him out of the dangerous pass in which he was with the black host of demons}. The two saints arose (and went) to him, and both fought (on his side) against them, and **bore the man with them to the kingdom of God, after defeating the demons**." (*Bethada Náem nÉrenn* [Lives of Irish Saints], Life 17).

St. Fursey

St. Fursey was a monk and missionary in Ireland, Britain and Gaul, he died c. 649. The Passage of Fursey (Transitus beati Fursei) or Life of Fursey [Vita beati Fursei] records the saint's visions, travels and death, and his burial at Péronne (north-east Gaul). It was written in Latin, probably in Gaul, c. 653/57. Nine manuscripts of the Passage survive, of which the earliest is London, British Library, Harley 5041, fols. 79-98 (eighth-century, northern Francia). The work was known by St. Bede, who incorporated parts of it into his Ecclesiastical History (731).

“On the third day, in the middle of the night, the men appeared while many kinsmen and friends and neighbors were visiting the illustrious man, a darkness came suddenly upon him, and his legs were overcome by cold and stiffened. Extending his hands in prayer, **he gladly received death**. He remembered the exceedingly pleasant vision, which he had seen previously, after having suffered the same symptoms. He fell down on his bed as if weighed-down by sleep. **He heard horrible voices of a great multitude clamoring and demanding for him to be coming-out** [Luke 12:20]. Opening his eyes, he saw nothing but the three aforementioned holy heavenly-messengers: two were set on either side, the third standing armed at his head. In a marvelous manner, he saw the aforementioned holy heavenly-messengers with the appearances and voices of a human, and he heard their songs with all sweetness of pleasantness.

Then the heavenly-messenger of the Lord at his right hand, consoling him, said, **“Do not be filled-with-fear; you have a defense.”** And as the heavenly-messengers lifted him up, he, perceiving no roof or house, **passed through the midst of howling and clamoring demons.** He heard one of them saying, “May we be moving-in to wage war in front of his face.” Then he saw a black cloud on the left side, curling in front of him, forming into a battle line in front of his

face. Now the bodies of the demons, as far as they were being-able to appear to his soul, were full of deformity and blackness, long-necked, filled with meagerness and filthiness and every horror; their heads swelled into the likeness of cauldrons. But when the demons flew or fought, he could not see the shape of their body, only a horrible and flittering shadow. (But what prudent reader does not know, that these things are done by the unclean spirits due to the terror of the soul which beholds them?). And due to the horrible darkness, he was never able to see their faces, exactly-as he also did not see those of the holy heavenly-messengers due to the brightness which was too much. The demons warred, shooting fiery arrows against them.

But all these most wicked weapons were extinguished by the heavenly-messenger's shield. Truly, the adversaries fell back before the countenance of the heavenly-messenger who was fighting, who said like a rationalizer, "Do not delay our journey, for this human is not a participant of your perdition." The adversaries, contradicting and reviling, said, "It is unjust for God, for a human who consented to a sinner to be having no condemnation, when it might be having been written: *'Not only the ones who are doing such things are worthy of death, but even the ones who are consenting to the ones who are doing them'."* [Rom. 1:32] Truly, while the heavenly-messengers were fighting, the holy man was estimating that the clamor of the fight and the crying of the demons was able to be heard all over the earth. When the spiritual-adversary was conquered, he raised up his venomous head like a bruised serpent, saying, "He often brought forth idle speeches; he is not entitled to enjoy a blessed life unharmed." The holy heavenly-messenger said, "Unless you might bring-forward principal crimes, he will not perish on account of minute ones." The ancient accuser said, "It is written: '*If you might not forgive humans their sins, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you of your trespasses.*'" [Matt. 6:14-15; Mark 11:26].

The holy heavenly-messenger responded, “When did he avenge himself, or to whom has he done wrong?” The slanderer said, “It is not written: ‘if you might not be avenging’; but: *‘If any you might not have forgiven from your hearts.’*” [Matt. 18:35] The heavenly-messenger of the Lord said, “May we be judged before the Lord.” The conquered enemy replenished his viperine venoms, speaking, “If the Lord is just, this human will not enter into the kingdom of the heavens; for it is written: *‘Unless you have been converted, and have become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of the heavens.’* [Matt. 18:3] This man has minimally fulfilled this word.” The holy heavenly-messenger, explaining, said, “He had innocence in his heart, but he continued according to the custom of a human.” The slanderer responded, “As he has accepted evil from the custom, so may he be accepting vengeance from the supreme judge.” The holy heavenly-messenger said, “May we be judged before the Lord.” As the holy heavenly-messenger fought on, the adversaries were crushed. Then the holy heavenly-messenger, who was at his right hand, said, “Look at the world.” Then the holy man looked. And he saw a dark valley set in the deepest part beneath him. And he saw four fires in the air, at a distance from each other by some spaces.

And the holy heavenly-messenger said again, “What are these fires?” The man of the Lord responded, “I do not know.” And the heavenly-messenger said, “These are four fires which burn up and consume the world. “The first: After all the sins of individuals have been forgiven in immersion, after their confession and their renunciation of the Slanderer, and all his works and pomps — but lying about these things which they have promised to renounce, they burn in the fire of lies. “The second is the fire of desire, which is inflamed by the lies of the promise and by the lies of the renunciation of the age. “The third is the fire of dissension, which is born from desire. “But the fourth is the fire of mercilessness, which arises from dissension. And from this fire are impiety and deceit (through which the weak are despoiled without mercy), contention, envy, and whatever is

similar to these. “Each one kindles a fire, because, by the augmentation of evil, sins increase from faults.” Truly, the fires grew, being made into one great flame, which approached him. Fearing the menacing fire, he said to the holy heavenly-messenger who was talking with him, “Lord, the fire is approaching me.” The heavenly-messenger responded, “Because you have not kindled it, it will not burn you. For although this fire is terrible and great, nevertheless, it will examine each person according to the merits of his works, because the desire of each and every person will burn in this fire. For in the same way that the body burns because of an unlawful lust, so it will burn because of a due punishment.”

Then he saw the holy heavenly-messenger who was going before him divide the flame of the fire into two walls on either side; and two holy heavenly messengers on either side defended him from the peril of the fire He also beheld unclean demons flying through the fire, waging a horrible war in the midst of the fire. And one of them said, *“The servant, who knows his lord’s will and does not do it, was much beaten.”* [Luke 12:47]. The holy heavenly-messenger responded, “But what part of his Lord’s will did he not fulfill?” The spiritual-adversary responded, “It is written: *‘The Most-High is disapproving the offerings of an iniquitous person.’* [Sirach 34:19] This man has received gifts from unrighteous persons.” The holy heavenly-messenger responded, “For he believed that each one of them had changed their mind.” The slanderer said, “He should have tested their perseverance in this change-of-mind, and, in this way, to have received the fruit of having done it. For *‘gifts blind the eyes of wise-men, and pervert the words of righteous men’*.” [Deut. 16:19] The holy heavenly-messenger responded, “We are judged before the Lord.” The deceitful slanderer, succumbing into revilements against the Author of everything, erupted, saying, “Until now we estimated that the Lord was truthful.” The holy heavenly-messenger responded, “For what else is he?” The most impudent demon said, “Because he promised, that every sin which is not being purged on the earth will

be judged in the heaven, Isaiah the prophet crying: *'But if any of you are willing and might hear me, you will eat the good of the earth; if you might not will this and might provoke me to anger, the sword will devour you.'* [Isa. 1:19-20].

"This human has not purged his sins on the earth, nor is he receiving his vengeance here. Where, then, is the justice of God?" The holy heavenly-messenger, rebuking them, said, "You, adversary, do not revile, while all of you might not be knowing the hidden judgments of the Lord." The slanderer responded, "What is this thing which has been hidden?" The holy heavenly-messenger said, "As long as a change-of-mind is hoped for, divine mercy attends a human." The spiritual-adversary responded, "But here, however, there is no place for a change-of-mind." The heavenly-messenger responded, "All of you are-ignorant of the depth of the mysteries of God; for perhaps there will even be." The slanderer responded, "Therefore, may we be parting, while there is not a reason for a judging." Truly, another of his henchmen said, "There still remains for that man a narrow gate, through which none but a few enter. There we can overcome that man: *'You will love your neighbor as yourself.'"* [Lev. 19:18] The heavenly-messenger responded, "This man did good to his neighbors." The adversary responded, "It is not sufficient to work good, unless he has loved them as himself." The holy heavenly-messenger responded, *"The fruit of love is to work good, for the Lord will reward every person according to his works."* [Rom. 2:6].

The dishonest demon said, "But because he has not fulfilled the word of God with love, he should be condemned." Truly, the impious multitude fought again, but the holy heavenly messengers were the victors. The defeated enemy, as was his custom, erupted into revilement, speaking, "If the Lord is not unjust, and if lying and transgressions of his word displease him, this man will not be free from punishment. For he promised to renounce the age, and, on the contrary, he has loved it, against the emissary's teaching, which

says*: 'Do not love the world, nor the things which are in the world'* [1John 2:15], and the other writings. Neither have the words of this man's own promise restrained him, nor by the emissary prohibiting it." The holy heavenly-messenger responded, "He has loved the things which are of the age, to be dispensed, not only to himself, but to all those who go in." The most impious slanderer said, "It does not matter whatever way he might be loved; it is contrary to the divine precept and against the promise of Christianity which is made in immersion."

The heavenly-messengers were victorious over their conquered adversaries, and the slanderer returned to his cunning accusations, speaking, "It is written: *'Unless you announce to a wicked person to turn from his wickedness, I will require his blood from your hand'* [Ezek. 3:18]. This man has not announced these things to sinners in a fitting way for them to have a change-of-mind." The holy heavenly-messenger responded, "But about this time, it is written: *'The prudent man will keep silence at that time, for it is an evil time'* [Amos 5:13]; For when the hearers despise the word, even the teacher's tongue is hindered; for he sees that the preaching being heard is despised." The ancient accuser responded, "He ought to be announcing even to the point of suffering, neither consenting, nor keeping-silent." But amid all these demons' contradictions, an excessively very-strong battle persisted, until (**since the Lord is the judge**), the heavenly-messengers were being triumphant, and their adversaries, having been crushed, were having been defeated. The holy man was surrounded by an immense brightness, with the choirs of the holy heavenly-messengers chanting together, "No labor should seem hard, it is not a long time by which the glory of eternity is acquired." All were filled, both with joy and sweetness." (The Passage of Fursey, chapters 2 and 3)

Commentary:

Just as in the temptation of Christ in the desert, the demons use Sacred Scripture itself to accuse us, but the Angels also use it to defend us. Interestingly, this fits in with what St. Augustine mentions about his mother's situation after death: “For she will not reply [to the enemy] that she owes nothing…but she will answer that *‘her sins are forgiven’* [Matt. 9:2].”

St. Bede the Venerable

St. Bede (ca. 673-735) was a Benedictine Hieromonk of Wearmouth-Jarrow Abbey. He was one of the greatest teachers and writers during the Early Middle Ages. His most famous work is the Ecclesiastical History of the English People, where he mentions the aforementioned story of St. Fursey.

“Whilst Sigbert still governed the kingdom, there came out of Ireland a holy man called Fursey, renowned both for his words and actions, and remarkable for singular virtues, being desirous to live as a stranger and pilgrim for the Lord's sake, wherever an opportunity should offer. [...] Now, in course of time he himself built a monastery, wherein he might with more freedom devote himself to his heavenly studies. There, falling sick, as the book concerning his life clearly informs us, **he fell into a trance, and quitting his body from the evening till cockcrow, he was accounted worthy to behold the sight of the choirs of angels, and to hear their glad songs of praise.** He was wont to declare, that among other things he distinctly heard this refrain: “The saints shall go from strength to strength.” And again, “The God of gods shall be seen in Sion” [Ps. 84:7]. Being restored to his body, and again taken from it three days after, **he not only saw the greater joys of the blessed, but also fierce conflicts of evil spirits, who by frequent accusations wickedly endeavored to obstruct his journey to heaven; but the angels protected him, and all their endeavors were in vain**. Concerning all these matters, if any one desires to be more fully informed, to wit, with what subtlety of deceit the devils recounted both his actions and idle words, and even his thoughts, as if they had been written down in a book; and what joyous or grievous tidings he learned from the holy angels and just men who appeared to him among the angels; let him read the little book of his life which I have mentioned, and I doubt not that he will thereby reap much spiritual

profit. But there is one thing among the rest, which we have thought it may be beneficial to many to insert in this history. When he had been taken up on high, he was bidden by the angels that conducted him to look back upon the world.

Upon which, casting his eyes downward, he saw, as it were, a dark valley in the depths underneath him. He also saw four fires in the air, not far distant from each other. Then asking the angels, what fires those were, he was told, they were the fires which would kindle and consume the world. One of them was of falsehood, when we do not fulfil that which we promised in Baptism, to renounce the Devil and all his works. The next was of covetousness, when we prefer the riches of the world to the love of heavenly things. The third was of discord, when we do not fear to offend our neighbor even in needless things. The fourth was of ruthlessness when we think it a light thing to rob and to defraud the weak. These fires, increasing by degrees, extended so as to meet one another, and united in one immense flame. When it drew near, fearing for himself, he said to the angel, “Lord, behold the fire draws near to me.” The angel answered, “That which you did not kindle will not burn you; for though this appears to be a terrible and great pyre, yet it tries every man according to the merits of his works; for every man's concupiscence shall burn in this fire; for as a man burns in the body through unlawful pleasure, so, when set free from the body, he shall burn by the punishment which he has deserved.” Then he saw one of the three angels, who had been his guides throughout both visions, go before and divide the flaming fires, whilst the other two, flying about on both sides, defended him from the danger of the fire. **He also saw devils flying through the fire, raising the flames of war against the just. Then followed accusations of the envious spirits against himself, the defense of the good spirits, and a fuller vision of the heavenly hosts; as also of holy men of his own nation**, who, as he had learnt, had worthily held the office of priesthood in old times, and who were known to fame; from whom he heard many

things very salutary to himself, and to all others that would listen to them.

When they had ended their discourse, and returned to Heaven with the angelic spirits, there remained with the blessed Fursey, the three angels of whom we have spoken before, and who were to bring him back to the body. And when they approached the aforesaid great fire, the angel divided the flame, as he had done before; but when the man of God came to the passage so opened amidst the flames, the unclean spirits, laying hold of one of those whom they were burning in the fire, cast him against him, and, touching his shoulder and jaw, scorched them. He knew the man, and called to mind that he had received his garment when he died. The holy angel, immediately laying hold of the man, threw him back into the fire, and the malignant enemy said, “Do not reject him whom you before received; for as you received the goods of the sinner, so you ought to share in his punishment.” But the angel withstood him, saying, “He did not receive them through avarice, but in order to save his soul.” The fire ceased, and the angel, turning to him, said, “That which you kindled burned you; for if you had not received the money of this man that died in his sins, his punishment would not burn you.” And he went on to speak with wholesome counsel of what ought to be done for the salvation of such as repented in the hour of death.” (Ecclesiastical History Bk. 3.19)

“Most beloved, now that the time of paying the debt to nature has arrived, I ask you to intercede with our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, in whom the prince of this world found nothing, **to send to me an angel of peace to guide me** to the attainment of my salvation; **and being guarded by his protection, I might not be confounded when I speak to my enemies in the gate**.” (The Life of Saint Bede the Venerable, 11th century)[9]

[9] “The account of his life presented here was composed in Latin in Northern England towards the close of the eleventh century…” [https://www.scriptoriumpress.ca/]

St. Boniface the Apostle to the Germans

St. Boniface (ca. 680-755) was an English Benedictine monk and leading figure in the Anglo-Saxon mission to the Germanic parts of Francia during the eighth century. The excerpt below is from a letter that St. Boniface wrote to Eadburga, the Abbess of Minster Abbey, describing the visions of a man who had died and came to life again in the convent of the Abbess Milburga (Barking Abbey).

“And now, thanks be to Almighty God, I am able to fulfill your wish more fully and more accurately because I myself spoke recently with the aforesaid resurrected brother when he returned to this country from beyond the seas. He then related to me in his own words the astounding visions which he saw in the spirit while he was out of the body. […]. And angels of such pure splendor bore him up as he came forth from the body that he could not bear to gaze upon them. With joyful and harmonious voices, they sang: “O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath; neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.” “They carried me up,” he said, "high into the air, and I saw a mighty fire surrounding the whole earth, and flames of enormous size puffing up on high and embracing, as it were, in one ball the whole mechanism of the world, had not a holy angel checked it by the sign of the holy cross of Christ. For when the sign of the cross was made over against the threatening flame, it faded in great part and died away. I suffered intolerably from the heat, my eyes smarting and smitten by the glare of flashing spirits until an angel, splendid to look upon, laid his protecting hands upon my head and saved me from all injury by the flames." He reported further that in the space of time while he was out of the body, a greater multitude of souls left their bodies and gathered in the place where he was than he had thought to form the whole race of mankind on earth.

He also said that there was a crowd of evil spirits and a glorious choir of the higher angels. And he said that the

wretched spirits and the holy angels had a violent dispute concerning the souls that had come forth from their bodies, the demons bringing charges against them and aggravating the burden of their sins, the angels lightening the burden and making excuses for them. He heard all his own sins, which he had committed from his youth on and had failed to confess or had forgotten or had not recognized as sins, crying out against him, each in its own voice, and accusing him grievously. […] He related also that there came to this assembly the soul of a certain man who had died while holding the office of abbot, a soul which seemed to be of rare beauty. The evil spirits seized upon it, claiming it as belonging with them. But one of the angel choir replied: “I will quickly show you, miserable spirits, that this soul is certainly not in your power.” Thereupon a great troop of purified souls broke in and said: “This was our elder and our teacher, and through his instruction he won us all to God; at that price he was redeemed, and dearly he is not in your power.” So, they joined with the angels in their fight against the demons, and with the help of the angels they snatched that soul away from the power of the evil spirits and set it free. Then an angel spoke in reproachful words, saying: “Now then, know ye and understand, ye wretched spirits, that you captured this soul unfairly, so away with you into everlasting fire!” Now, when the angel had spoken thus, the evil spirits broke into weeping and howling, and in a moment, as in the twinkling of an eye, they hurled themselves into the pits of glowing fire described above; after a brief interval, emerging again, they began anew their arguments about the merits of souls. The man related also that it was vouchsafed to him to look upon the merits of diverse men still living. Those who were free from blame and who, trusting to their holy virtues, were known to have the favor of God Almighty were ever safely guarded by angels with whom they were joined in intimate affection. But those who were befouled with dreadful crimes and the stains of a corrupt life were closely beset by a hostile spirit, who ever urged them on to evil

deeds, and as often as they sinned in word or act, he held them up to the merriment of other infernal spirits.” (Letter XIII, To the Holy Virgin and Dear Lady Eadburga)

Muspilli

The Christian eschatological poem known as "Muspilli" survives in fragmentary form in a 9th century Bavarian manuscript; the text in Old German describes what happens to the soul after death, the events of the end times, the battle between the Holy Prophet Elijah and the Antichrist, the Second Coming of Christ, the Resurrection and the Last Judgement. The important thing here, however, is the testimony about the Christian belief that, after death, men's souls are contested by angels and demons.

"...his day comes, when he has to die. Immediately afterwards, when the soul starts its journey and leaves the body behind, then a host comes from heaven's firmament And another from hell: then they will fight for her [i.e. the soul]. The soul has to worry until the judgment is made, As to which host she is brought, For if Satan's retainers win her, They promptly lead her [the soul] to a place where pain awaits her, Into fire and darkness: that is a truly horrible verdict. But if she is taken by those who come from heaven And is claimed by the Angels, They promptly bring her up to the Heavenly Kingdom Where there is life without death, light without darkness, A refuge without worry: there nobody suffers sickness. For if a person wins a place in Paradise, A house in heaven, he will find a lot of support there. Thus the need is great for everybody, that his [spirit/heart] is moved to gladly do God's will And firmly avoid hellfire, Hell's pain: there, the ancient Satan waits With hot fire. Therefore he, who knows himself to be sinful, shall think about this with great worry."

Royal Mercian Prayer Book

The Royal Prayer Book is a collection of prayers believed to have been copied in the late 8th or early 9th century. It was written in England, in the kingdom of West Mercia, probably in or around Worcester.

“O Only-Begotten Son of God, Who Art Ever to me an Impregnable Protection, my Guard that never sleeps, my Defense that never fails: O Christ, Who in Heaven Art the Stay of the Angels, be now and forever my Propitiator with the Father. O Mediator between God and man, I beseech Thee, through Thy Passion and the Redemption of Thy Life-Giving Cross, that **when Thou shalt please to call me from this world, Thou wilt send the Angels of Peace to guard my soul and conduct it to the place of rest, and enable it to pass unscathed through the ranks of the rulers and powers of darkness.** And, O Jesus Christ my Lord, may all who in that hour pray and plead for me find the ears of Thy Mercy open to their cries.” (8th Century Royal Mercian Prayer Book; Prayer 14 of the Series of 23 Prayers)

The Battle of Maldon (Poem)

“The Battle of Maldon” is the name given to an Old English poem (ca. 10-11th century) celebrating the Battle of Maldon of 991, at which an Anglo-Saxon army failed to repulse a Viking raid. Byrhtnoth was the Ealdorman of Essex, a noble who led the Anglo-Saxon army against the Vikings. Before dying in battle, Byrhtnoth uttered a prayer where he asks to protection against the demonic forces in his journey to Heaven.

“Byrhtnoth looked to heaven [and said]: ‘I thank you, Wielder of peoples, for all these joys that I have experienced in the world. Now I have, O merciful God, the greatest need that Thou vouchsafe the grace unto my spirit **that my soul may journey to Thee**, into thy dominion, King of Angels, **passing in peace. I entreat Thee that adversaries of Hell oppress me not**’.” (The prayer of Byrhtnoth, The Battle of Maldon Poem, lines 172-80)

St. Oswald of Worcester

Saint Oswald of Worcester was the Archbishop of York from 972 to his death in 992. He was brought up by his uncle, Oda of Canterbury, who sent him to the abbey of Fleury (France) to become a monk. As bishop and archbishop, Oswald was one of the leading promoters of Dunstan's reforms (or English Benedictine Reform). Oswald founded a number of monasteries, including Ramsey Abbey. His life (Vita S. Oswaldi) was written ca. 997-1002 by Byrhtferth of Ramsey, a benedictine monk at the aforementioned Abbey, one of the most learned and well-read scholars of the 10th and 11th centuries.

“**Holy angels took the soul of the blessed man** [King Edward the Martyr] into their hands at the bidding of the Just Judge; **they wished to take it to the joys of the celestial realm. But foul demons gainsaid this, wishing to hinder it and to ensnare it with their wicked machinations**; for it was revealed thus to someone in a vision. And when the angels feared greatly on the soul's behalf that it would be carried off by the evil demons, a voice came down from on high, which spoke as follows— it was the voice of the Just Judge, Whose command all the heavenly powers and all the hosts of the celestial kingdom obey (it said) — ‘Take the soul to the refreshment of Paradise, where it shall remain for five years; thereafter I shall reveal of what distinction is he who was innocently murdered’.” (Byrhtferth of Ramsey, The Life of St. Oswald, Part IV, 21).

The Collect Prayer of the *"Missa Defunctorum"*

The Collect prayer of the "Requiem Mass" in the old (or extraordinary) form of the Roman rite. The date is uncertain, possibly from the 8th-10th centuries. Of Roman or Gallic origin.

"O God, Whose property is ever to have mercy and to spare, we humbly entreat Thee **on behalf of the soul** of Thy servant (handmaid) N..., whom Thou hast bidden this day **to pass out of this world**: that Thou wouldst **not deliver him into the hands of the enemy**, nor forget him for ever, but **command him to be taken up by the holy angels**, and to be borne to our home in Paradise, that as he had put his faith and hope in Thee, he may not undergo the pains of Hell but may possess everlasting joys. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God, unto the ages of ages.."[10]

Commentary:

The prayer demonstrates that the ancient Latin church understood that after death there was a period of "translation" of the soul that "has passed from this world" (it is not a prayer for a dying person), the prayer was (and still is) for a ceremony where the person had passed away recently (usually with the body present). The prayer only makes sense if the person is neither before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10) for the "private judgment" nor in hell, but on the way. Curiously, on this journey she may fall "into the hands of the enemy" if she doesn't receive the help of the "holy angels" who will take her up to Paradise, just as in the Orthodox view. The particular

[10] *"Deus, cui proprium est misereri semper et parcere, te supplices exoramus pro anima famuli tui N. (famulae tuae N.), quam hodie de hoc saeculo migrare jussisti: ut non tradas eam in manus inimici, neque obliviscaris in finem, sed jubeas earn a Sanctis Angelis suscipi et ad patriam paradisi perduci; ut, quia in te speravit et credidit, non pcenas inferni sustineat, sed gaudia aaterna possideat. Per Dominum."*

judgment itself seems to already start at this journey, since if Christ doesn't send his angels, she will be delivered into the hands of her enemies. After the end of the liturgy (if the body is present) the rite “Absolutio super Tumulum” [Absolution over the Tomb] is performed. After the coffin has been asperged and incensed, this Collect prayer is recited once again. At the end of the rite, it is chanted: “May the angels lead thee into Paradise…”[11] The Latin tradition knew the importance of the protective role of the angels and of praying for the soul at his departure, even if for a much shorter time than the Eastern practice. After a few centuries this idea seems to have been completely forgotten in the West, surviving as a liturgical relic that reveals a faith from a bygone era. Western prayers for the dead took “other directions”, changing focus when Latin eschatology consolidated its view of Purgatory.

[11] *In paradísum dedúcant te Angeli: in tuo advéntu suscípiant te Mártyres, et perdúcant te in civitátem sanctam Jerúsalem, Chorus Angelórum te suscípiat, et cum Lázaro quondam páupere ætérnam hábeas réquiem.*

Panel of Saint Michael (*Taula de Sant Miquel*)

The panel of St. Michael (image on the next page) is an altarpiece from a small Romanesque-style chapel (11th century) in the town of Soriguerola (Catalonia-Spain). The work is dated to the mid-13th century and is attributed to a "master of Soriguerola."

Commentary:

The part of the altarpiece that interests us is the depiction of a scene of *Psychostasia* (Ψυχοστασία). "The term psychostasis comes from the Greek and it means the weighing of the soul or the battle of the soul, that is, the process that decides salvation or condemnation of the soul."[12] The idea of using scales in judgment can be found in Scriptures, for example in Job 31:6 and Daniel 5:27, also in the pseudo-epigraphic literature like in 1Enoch 61:8, 2Esdras[4Ezra] 3:34 and the Testament of Abraham (cp. 12 long recension; cp. 9-10 short recension). Although the depiction of the Archangel Michael holding a pair of scales appears in later Western works of art, its meaning has generally been explained as being his role only at the Last Judgement. However, the "*Taula de Sant Miquel*" shows us something different.

The judgment depicted is not that of the Last Judgment, but the particular judgment of souls. The demons seeking to conquer the soul are not in Hell, but before the Heavenly Gates (which brings us back to St. Bede's prayer where he asks to *"not to be confounded when I speak to my enemies* ***in the gate****"*), that is, in the aerial places (Eph. 6:12) through which the soul has traveled with its guardian angel to reach the gates of Heaven, where we also see St. Peter depicted as a gatekeeper holding the keys of Heaven with one

[12] Rodríguez Peinado, L. (2013). La Piscostasis. Complutense University of Madrid, Dept. of Art History I (Medieval).

hand and with the other welcoming a soul that will enter Paradise. At the bottom left, we see a demon in Hell who stretches out his right hand to his fellow demons in the air, waiting for them to hand over a captured soul in order to drag it to Hell, and with his other hand he delivers a newly captured soul to another demon. At the top left we see a brown demon, who pushes the scale down with his hand, and a blue demon who, with all his might, pulls the scale down to make it look heavier (as St. Boniface described in his letter to Eadburga: *"for the demons were accusing the dead and making heavy the burden of their sins"*); demonstrating that the demons, just as in the imagery of the Tollhouses, will use all kinds of trickery and lies to falsely impute sins to that soul. As in the Eastern tradition, the ancient Western

tradition seemed to conceive as part of the private judgment the figure of a struggle between angels and demons over the fate of the soul. Here, instead of the figure of Toll Houses (τελωνεία) and Tax collectors, the didactic figure used was that of a “weighing of souls” (Ψυχοστασία).

Alphonsus Liguori

A bishop and doctor of the Roman church from the 18th century.

“As soon as a man expires, judgment will settle against him. **Then the accusers will come, especially the devil who tempted him during his life** and the Guardian Angel whose inspirations he despised. Jesus Christ himself, who was present at everything, will be both witness and judge. [...] As soon as man expires, judgment will be passed on him [...]. The **scales of divine justice** will not weigh the wealth, dignity or nobility of people, **but only their deeds.** That's why Daniel said to King Balthazar: “You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting” [Dan 5:27]. [...] it is not the king's gold or power that is **in the balance, but only his person.** Then the accusers will come, and first of all the devil. [...] demons and guardian angels [...] will be the soul's accusers before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ...” (Meditations: For All the Days and Feasts of the Year: Volume II).

“When a man leaves this life, says Isaiah, Hell is stirred up and **sends out the most terrible demons** to tempt that soul before it leaves the body, and then **to accuse it when it stands before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ** ready to be judged: Hell below was in an uproar to meet thee at thy coming, it stirred up the [shadows of the] giants for thee [Is 14:9].” (Glories of Mary, Part I, §3)

Commentary:

It is very interesting that the roman doctor attributes a role for demons in the particular judgment, as accusers of our souls. The figure here is that of Psychostasia, in his own words: the “scales of divine justice”.

Conclusion:

Both Churches believe in a period after death in which demons accuse us, a process that is part of the Particular Judgment. In the Hiberno-Saxon Church, this process received a different kind of attention, seeming much closer to the Eastern Christian attitude.

Over time, the two traditions have given different emphasis to this process, with the Roman Church being more concerned with praying for the souls who have been imprisoned and developing an elaborate theology for the purgatory system, devoting very little time to prayers dedicated to obtaining a favorable sentence in the Particular Judgment by defeating the accusers. The Orthodox Church, on the other hand, focused its prayers on the period of 40 days after death, so that the soul would escape being detained by the accusers, while continuing to pray for it if it was detained in Hades. Therefore, those western christians who try to compare the Orthodox doctrine of the Tollhouses with strange gnostic ideas or those who say that the Tollhouses put the demons in the role of judges are wrong, since their own tradition bears witness to this process in the departure of the soul.